

True Gospel - Pt6 - Acceptance in the Beloved

by Paul Washer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of resting in God's unconditional love and experiencing the freedom of being a recipient of his grace, rather than trying to earn or deserve it.

Duration: 1:56:36

Scripture: Isaiah 66:1-2, Isaiah 66:9, Isaiah 66:13, Matthew 6:33, John 10:10, 1 Corinthians 3:7

Topics: "Gods Love", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares personal experiences and reflections on his journey with God. He talks about how he initially approached serving God with a strong work ethic, but felt like a failure and wanted a place to be alone with his shortcomings. The speaker emphasizes that God's commands are not meant to be restrictive, but to bring abundant life and joy. He then delves into a passage from the Bible that speaks about the intense love and desire between a bride and groom, relating it to our relationship with God. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God's presence and a reminder of His unconditional love.

Transcript

Father, we come before you in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. And our hearts are full of thanksgiving, hearts are full of praise. What more could we ask of you, Lord, that you have not already done for us? We praise you and we worship you and we honor you.

We bless you. We are so feeble, Lord, and so small and so tired. You are such a great God, such a merciful savior, such a blessed redeemer, giver of life.

Oh, holy, holy, holy is the Lord. There is none like him in the heavens or the earth or under the earth. To him be all the glory, honor, and praise forever and ever.

In Jesus name, Lord, I ask for wisdom. Ask for wisdom and that you would pour forth your spirit on your people. Oh, God, fulfill the promises, Lord, pour forth your spirit on your people.

In greater and greater measure, Lord, in greater and greater measure. Oh, Lord, you've made some hearts tender. Pour forth your spirit upon them.

Get glory for yourself, Lord. Bring to fruition, Lord, the fruit you have ordained before the foundation of the world. Oh, God, for your own glory, for the honor of your son and for the joy of your people.

In Jesus name, amen. I am. I am so wonderfully happy in the Lord today.

For all his kindness that he has shown to us in so many ways. You know that the past several days I have been preaching. Very hard, certain truths that cut to the core and they are quite necessary.

We are filled in this day with a multitude of men and women and young people. That attend that enter into ecclesiastical buildings, but do not know the Lord. They do not know the Lord.

And I have been speaking to people who profess Christ and who have been led by. Men who do not know the truth to believe that if they just prayed a magic prayer. Then they were signed, sealed and delivered for heaven and that they were going to heaven and that nothing could take away from that and that no one could cast doubt upon their profession.

And I've tried to demonstrate that that is not true. That salvation is purely a work of the grace of God, that we are saved by faith alone. But that salvation is a supernatural work of God and it will always bear fruit, always bear fruit.

And that our assurance of salvation does not come from the fact that we wrote our name in the back of our Bibles on the day that we prayed a prayer. Our assurance of salvation is an ongoing thing. As the Lord works in our lives and manifests himself and produces fruit, and as we grow from glory to glory and from holiness to greater holiness, but also his salvation and the fact of our eternal life is manifested that when we do stumble and we do fall, it is against our nature.

It breaks our hearts. It wounds our heads. And the Lord in his everlasting love with this strong ancient love with which he has loved us always will come and retrieve us back.

He is a zealous God. And he does not come to his children in wrath, comes to his children in love and in hope, but he will come. And that is the line that differentiates the love of God from even his hatred.

Let me give you an example. The Bible, he says, Jacob I loved and Esau I hated. Now, if you look at the life of Esau, God blessed him.

God poured out many blessings, fulfilled many promises with regard to his person. And yet in Scripture, we hear one of the most devastating statements. It says that Esau I hated.

Esau was so wealthy, so blessed by God that when Jacob came back into the promised land, Esau needed nothing from him. His bags were full. So how is it that God loved Jacob and hated Esau? Well, it's very clear.

And this will help you again to determine whether or not you truly know him and he truly knows you. If you look at Jacob's life, he could not escape God. Do you realize that? Do you see all the things he did? How conniving he was? How fleshly he was? How many decisions he made that were against the will of God? How many things he did that were so wrong? But in every one of those, God captured him.

God would not let him go. God disciplined him. Yes, God even beat him to the point when he came back into the promised land, he came back literally a cripple from the working of God in his life.

We find no such thing in the life of Esau. Have you ever wondered why the wicked prosper? Because they do not belong to God. They are not his children.

He lets them run like a wild dog in the yard. But if you know him, if he knows you, if you are his child, he will not tolerate such things with you. Not a toleration of hatred, not a intoleration of wrath, but an intoleration of love.

He will come after you. What would you think of a man who had a 13-year-old daughter that he allowed to wander the streets all night and come in every morning at six in the morning, drunken and beaten and having lived a night of sin? What would you think of a man who would allow his daughter to do that? His tiny daughter every day. You would call him a derelict father.

You would call him a beast. You'd call him a devil. Dear friend, never make the same accusation against God.

Never make the same accusation against God. Preachers and people today speaking of men and women and young people in churches and on Christian campuses and claiming them to be children of God, that they have a heavenly father that watches over them. And yet, what do you see? They run in the streets.

They do all manner of things and this father never comes for them. But now, let's look at you for a moment. Have you ever marveled at the fact that you could not escape Him? Have you ever marveled at the fact that if you wanted to get in your car, turn on the keys and go as far away from God as you possibly could get, He was there when you got there, turning you back.

Then on the least little thing, He seems to be into your life, working. This is a manifestation of salvation. Sometimes when I preach, you might have a tendency to believe that I'm even talking about perfectionism.

I am talking about no such thing. Matter of fact, the greatest evidence that you have truly been born again, that you have truly been born again, that you are humble and contrite before God and you tremble at His Word and you recognize His need, your need of Him. Tonight, there are one billion things that I want to share because these are good things.

I'm talking tonight to the children of God. These are good things to share. Happy, happy good news.

And I know that I've started off with a very sad spirit in a sense because I know that no matter what I do, I'm not going to be able to do justice to what ought to be done. But that the Lord would use pitiful words to somehow encourage your heart as a believer here tonight, that you would be encouraged. Now, one of the first things that I want to do is turn to Isaiah 66, verse 2, the verse that I just quoted.

We're going to go to a lot of different places and I'm going to break a lot of preaching rules tonight, but that's OK. I am so happy in the Lord in Isaiah 66, verse 2. My hand made all these things. Thus, all these things came into being, declares the Lord.

Now, what is he saying here and why is he saying it? You have to understand this by verse 1. Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where then is the house that you could build for me? We so often think, especially in Southern Baptist life and conservative Baptists and others, of salvation refers to doing, doing, doing. All right, now we're saved to serve.

We're saved to do this. We're saved. I don't believe any of that.

Because look what we have in verse 1. Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where then is a house that you could build for me? And where is a place that I may rest? How often throughout the

Scriptures God says, if I was hungry, I wouldn't ask you. I own a cattle on a thousand hills.

And he says God does not dwell in temples made by human hands. And he also says God is, he literally says God is not served by human hands. You see, what you need to understand is that you've been called into something.

Yes, the Bible calls us slaves and we do not want to take away from that. But at the same time, you are not just slaves. You are sons and you are daughters.

And he did not save you so that you could do something for him. He saved you so that he could show how great the works would be that he would do for you. Let me share with you what you will always be.

You'll never outgrow this and you'll never get better than this. And to be honest with you, I don't want to get better than this. You will never be anything except a recipient of God's grace, of God's undeserved favor.

God has orchestrated everything he has orchestrated to manifest his greatness and his power and the infinite amount of his love in saving you. Now, here's something is very, very special. In verse two, he says, and for my hand made all these things.

Thus, all these things came into being, declares the Lord. But to this one, I will look. Now, this phrase is very, very important.

It's the idea, especially Old Testament, the Jewish literature. To this one, I will look. This may be properly translated.

This one, I will esteem. Now, stop for a moment. This is a strange word.

Let me speak to you something for a moment about the greatness of God. That's one of the problems in our churches today is we don't know enough about the attributes of God. One of the attributes of God is his beauty.

I bet possibly you've never thought about that. His excellencies, his perfections. Now, here's something that you need to understand.

God is so beautiful. So perfect and so excellent. There is never a reason for him to take his eyes off of himself.

That is why God's never had a need. If someone ever tells a child God created them because he was lonely, they blasphemed. That's not true.

See, God is so beautiful, so holy, so excellent, so perfect that for him to take his eyes off of himself to look at any other thing is condescension. It's for example, if I was looking at let's say I was there was a tour of Monet and in Chicago and I went to see one of my favorites, the water lilies or Renoir or something, and I'm sitting there looking at it and then you're looking and you're sitting there and you walk up beside me. Hello, brother Paul.

Hello. And you start drawing a stick man and you say, brother Paul, yes, look at I've drawn something that's nice for me to bow my eyes from such a work to look at a stick man. It just doesn't add up in the equation.

Throughout all of eternity, God has been perfectly and completely full and satisfied by looking at himself, his reflection in the face of his son, totally and perfectly content. But look at this. He says he will turn his eyes away to this one.

I will look, you know, people talk about great acts of faith, raising the dead and walking across water and all sorts of things in my life as a missionary, I have seen God do many, many things, supernatural things. Of healing people of many things, usually through others, but I at least got to witness it. But, you know, in my opinion, what takes the greatest act of faith, what takes the greatest act of faith on the part of the believer, at least for myself, is to look in the mirror, the mirror of God's word and see my stumbling and see my failure and see my need and to believe in the truth of his promises, the declarations about his love that he has made towards me, that he honestly and genuinely and truly and infinitely and unconditionally loves me.

You see, I was raised in a family where if you made a 98 on a test, you should have made 100. If you scored 22 points in a basketball game, you should have scored 30 and raised under a caliber of discipline. And when I was saved, I took that work ethic into my life with God to become another slave just to a bigger master.

That was all. And after several years in Peru, I wanted to die, but I didn't want to go to heaven and I didn't want to go to hell. I can remember being on the third floor of this old church in Lima, Peru, and crying out to God, God, if you would just create a place for someone like me where I could go and be alone with my failure and my loss and my stumbling and my sin, I have failed you, failed you.

I set out years ago to serve you as no one has ever served you before. And I have done nothing but fail and stumble. And even when I've run my best, it's been absolutely hopeless and useless.

And it was at that time with the most crushed spirit I could ever imagine. Suicidal, almost working 18 hours a day that at all at once the Lord showed me something that I will not give up. That he loves me and that everything about my life and everything about my joy and everything about my peace flows from his love towards me and not my dedication towards him.

You see, a lot of you young Christians, you know what you're struggling with and what you're going to struggle with your peace and your joy. You're happy and full of peace on those days that you do your quiet time. You're happy and full of peace and full of joy and feel loved when you do things that are right, don't you? And then when you miss one of the letters and stumble at one of the points and don't dot all the I's or cross all the T's, your peace is gone.

Your hope is gone. Everything is gone. Do you want to know why you're finding your joy in your ability to deserve God's love and not finding your joy in God's unconditional love that he loves you and that you do not have to move one quarter of an inch to the left or one quarter of an inch to the right.

And you don't have to be anybody. You don't have to be a great preacher. You don't have to be a great missionary.

You don't have to be a great anything. When you have a great God, you just rest. You have finally come to a place where you can rest, where you can rest.

Someone came to me a while back and said, you need to start a tape ministry and you need to do this and you need to do that. And then you could have this great big ministry and do all this stuff. And I said, but

then I wouldn't have any time to go fishing.

And they got really mad at me and they said, why did you say that? And I said, I didn't mean it that way, but I'm trying to prove a point. I said, I played that game. I don't have to be big.

I don't want to be big. I don't have to be important. I don't want to be important.

The only thing I want to do is sit here and be loved by God. And I want to obey him, not so that he'll love me, but I want to obey him every day as a little child because he does love me. You don't have to climb any ladders anymore.

You don't have to you don't have to do anything. Now, this sounds totally contradictory to everything I've said this last week, doesn't it? You want to know why? Because we're finally at a point now where we can. So you see what you need to understand is a carnal man, a person who does not know Christ, but is religious, will take news like this and they'll say, well, great, I'm saved.

Let's go live like the devil. Yeah, a spiritual man, a spiritual woman, a spiritual boy and girl struggling will say. Could it be that I am loved this way? Could it be that I finally pass through a door where there's no conditions? Could it be that I am completely and perfectly loved? Could it be that I could? You know, one of the amazing things that I find about Adam and Eve.

That the moment they sinned against God, they not only ran away from God, they hid from each other. And everyone, you know, has this thing about, well, they found out they were naked and all this other stuff, but I think it goes a lot deeper than that. You see, Adam saw what he was and thought to himself, there's no way anybody would want to hold somebody like me.

Eve saw what she was. She saw her filth and she said, there's no way anybody would have me anymore. You hide.

I had a very, very troubled childhood and a lot of terrible problems. And when my little boy was born, I remember God has restored unto me the years that the locust took for me. And when my little boy was born, he grows up.

We have just I just love him to death and we're always playing and I don't have time to preach or do anything anymore. And one day I walked into the bedroom and the moment he saw me, he turned around and just went. And God spoke to me.

He did. When you say that is seldom as I say it, you can say it with authority. He said, you were once like that when you were a little boy.

You had no doubt in your mind that if you stretched open your arms, that the person you were stretching out to would run to you and pick you up. Now, you were beaten and you were abused and you lost that. But now I am here and I am your father.

There will never be a time when you stretch out your arms that I will see you dirty. There will never be a time when you stretch out your arms that I will not come running to you. There will never be a time.

It doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't matter what you. There will never be a time.

Do you understand me? Just like this little boy, not one doubt enters into his mind that his father is going to run across the floor of that bedroom and sweep him up in his arms and do a jig across the bedroom. He has no doubt in his mind. He knows you're going to do it.

I want you to know, son, that's exactly what I'm going to do for you always and unconditionally. And that and what does God see as beautiful? He knows our frame. Have you not read Psalms 103? Let's go there for just a second.

Hold your place in Isaiah. Where do you begin on this text? Verse 11, for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his loving kindness towards those who fear him. Heaven, Earth cannot speak of heaven.

Jesus made that quite clear. Even John the Baptist, the prophet, could not speak of heaven because the only one who had seen heaven was the one who descended from heaven. And that is the son of man.

We are talking about a love that you will spend not the rest of your life discovering. No, my dear friend, dear child of God, look at me. We are talking about a love that you will spend the rest of eternity seeking to mark out.

And even then, after a million eternity or an eternity of eternities have passed, you will still not even come close to the foothills of God's love. Do you understand that? See, so many people think, well, I always get this question in universities. Well, when I get to heaven, will I know everything? I say, no, you'll know a lot, but you won't know everything.

Because you see, what we're going to know there is God and God is infinite. You think you're going to walk up that first day and you're going to look at God and say, wow, I've seen him now. Well, then what's left to do? No, you see, God is infinite.

He's infinite. And what that means is this. You're going to walk into heaven.

You're going to see a revelation of God that you could never, you know, eye has not seen, ear has not heard this revelation of the love of God manifested towards you. And you are going to fall down in such ecstasy and joy and worship and pleasure. That if you had not been supernaturally strengthened, it would have killed you.

And then you go to bed. Well, not really, but that's the only way I can tell this story. And then the next day you get up thinking, let's go see this great God of ours.

Only that when you get there, a greater manifestation awaits you. And then a greater fullness and greater ecstasy and greater joy. That if even the day before you had not been strengthened, hence, it would have killed you again.

And that through all eternity, the only thing you're going to be doing is just seeking out the pleasures of God sitting at his table that no, no end. It's never the same meal twice. It just gets bigger and bigger and better and better and better.

It's an amazing thing for as high as the heavens are above the earth. So great is his loving kindness towards those who fear him, to those who fear him. Fear is an awful word sometimes.

Like when a little boy walks up to his dad and he doesn't know what's going to happen. It depends what's in the heart of his dad. He walks up and his dad comes and says, hello, boy, and rubs him on the head.

And he breathes a sigh of relief. The next morning, he walks up to his dad with a little bit of confidence because of the day before and says, hey, dad, his dad takes him and smacks him against the wall. You see, that's fear because of the inconsistent, wicked heart of a man.

You fear them because you don't know what they're going to do with you. So many of you have such great fear about that with God. You almost run from him because you just don't know.

Can his heart be as consistent as he says? Because I'm not consistent at all. I go to him one day. I think I've done pretty good.

But even then, my righteousness is not all that great. And I've got hidden sins I don't even know about. And then I go to him another day.

Will he respond the same way? And if I don't have my quiet time and I don't do this or that or this, am I going to be able to get in through the door? Is he going to extend his scepter towards me? Or am I going to be judged for coming into his throne room unannounced? But you see, when the Bible talks about fear, it's not a bad thing for the believer. It's not a bad thing. The word would be awe, beauty so great.

I don't know if you can understand me, but beauty so great that it makes you afraid. Love so strong that it picks you up and takes you. It takes over your life.

It engulfs you. A compassion so sweet that at first you wish you never tasted it. And you want to know why? Because you think this is so sweet it's got to end.

And when it ends, it'll break my heart. When it changes and goes away and I don't feel it, it'll kill me. I wish I'd have never tasted it at first.

That's not the way it is with God. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Taste and see.

He says as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his loving kindness towards those who fear him. You know this word loving kindness. I know that they've done the best that they can translating this word, but it doesn't work.

There's no way to really translate this word. There's just not. Loving kindness doesn't do it.

Nothing does it. Just imagine if you could take. I look at this word like a big bag, a big bag filled with all the pleasures and mercies and kindnesses of God and lavished on you all of the greatness of God's disposition, all of his forgiveness, all of his kindness, all of his all of his compassion laid at your feet.

Poured over your head and running down your face. He says as far as the East is from the West so far, he has removed our transgressions from us. Do you believe that? I so love and appreciate King David.

He was a wild man. Do you realize that? Your great sin against God is not that you have too much passion. Your great sin against God is you don't have enough passion.

He was wild. And sometimes awkward and sometimes like a bull in a china shop and sometimes quite disobedient. There's one thing he seemed to grasp that God really is powerful to forgive.

He really believed it. He believed it with all his heart. And when God would forgive him, he was forgiven.

It was over. I wish that some of you could come into that truth of being just free, of being free. But that being free, part of that comes with the humility that God grants by grace.

Oftentimes our heart condemns us. Satan condemns us. Men condemn us.

I know you, Paul Washer. You're not all that. Well, I thought that was common knowledge.

You don't deserve half the benefits he's poured out on your head. Look, if you want to talk, let's talk about something new. Tell me something I don't know.

Where do you get the making these great claims? I have a great God. What is your hope? The cross of Jesus Christ, where he shed his own blood for my soul and he paid it. What you need to see when he cried out, it is finished.

He said that for his people. He said that for his people. He looked right in his people's eye and he said, it is finished.

This dividing wall between me and you is gone. It is gone. Talking about being raised into the heavenlies.

Do you know what I feel like? Several years ago, there was a picture, I believe, of John F. Kennedy and his little boy. John F. Kennedy is sitting in the Oval Office at the desk and his little boy is under the desk and he's sitting there playing with some toys. That's me.

That is me. And that is you. If you would just go there, go there.

Where did you learn how to pray? I listened to some of you. You're so religious. Where did you learn that? You twist your face and all sorts of things when you pray.

You even change the inflection of your voice. From whom did you learn that? I can tell who prays much. Our most gracious Heavenly Father who art in heaven, we come before you.

I don't want to make fun and please forgive me if you pray like that. But what I'm trying to say is, if you walked up to me and said, Brother Paul, how are you doing? I would really be afraid of you. I really would.

You'd scare me. The thing about it is, Father, here I am. I remember when I first became a Christian and was just going out on the streets, preaching and thought I was just so holy and so many different things that I was not.

And there was this girl, Campus Crusade, and she'd make me so mad because every more I'd see her walk out and she would look at the sun. She'd go, way to go, Dad. And I would get so mad at that irreverent little twit.

She'd make me so mad. Way to go, Dad. And then I happened to read the Bible where it says, Abba, Father.

Why did you turn that into a religious term? Can I ask you? It's not a religious term. It's a cry of a child. And that's all you'll ever be.

A child that can be perfectly and completely at peace. Not because you do it right. Not because you're the big shot in the kingdom.

Live at perfect peace because you are dearly and perfectly loved. Now, that's amazing. That is amazing.

As far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. You want to tell me how far the East is exactly from the West? Any mathematicians here? Do you see the point he's trying to make? They're gone. They are gone.

One time I was sitting there reading the book of Hebrews chapter 11. Have you ever read Hebrews chapter 11? Talking about all these good things about all these guys. And I'm reading this over and over and I've really got a problem reading this thing.

I'm going, God, you only mention all the good things. I mean, you're talking about these guys as though they never sinned. I think God could have responded, what? You're talking about these guys.

What sin? Well, you know, don't bring that up. Well, you know what? As far as the East is from the West, I have removed their sin. And to not believe that is to not believe.

You know, we think so many times we're humble because we believe. You know, well, I don't know if God has removed my sin. Let me tell you something.

You're not being humble. You are depreciating the value of the death of his perfect son on that tree. Heifers die for you.

Goats die for you. Bulls die for you. Your conscience should be troubled.

But when the precious blood of the Son of God is spilt, it's over. Because he has redeemed you, not with coins, not with pieces of silver, not even with trinkets from glory. He has redeemed you with the blood of his own son.

You're free. You are free. Do you see that? You are free.

You are loved. Verse 13, just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. For he himself knows our frame.

He is mindful that we are but dust. My dear friend, there are some of you out there tonight and you think too much of men. You do.

And it's going to be a stumbling block in your life. And I beg you to repent. Let me give you a little something that the Lord taught me years ago.

If you ever tell me, oh, this guy was a great man of God, I automatically know your theology is very bad. There never has been and never will be such a thing as a great man or woman of God. The only thing there has ever been are pitiful, little, weak, faithless, frightened, silly, foolish men and women of a great and merciful God.

The attribute great belongs to no one. You can't use an attribute once an attribute is given to God. Let me teach you something about theology.

Once an attribute is given to God, you can't give it to anyone else. There is a way in which that attribute is exclusively his. So if God is great, no one else is.

If God is good, no one else is, except that he grant them his righteousness. Do you see what I'm saying? I don't want to be a great man of God. I'll tell you what I want to be.

And I praise God because it's something I can be. A man of the grace of God. Now, for some of you, especially you Bible students, I want you to listen to me right now.

When I was in seminary, I prayed and fasted and witnessed more than everybody. And I made sure they knew it. So proud.

And I love the idea that when I walked into the library, all the laughter stopped because holiness has arrived. I loved when men saw me tired and thought what a great servant I was. When they saw me spent in war.

When they said they'd lift me up in prayer because of the great work of service I was doing for Jesus Christ. Then one day, as all things must fall, as God must tear down idols in his children, the Lord showed me the sickening wickedness and pride of all of that. And then the Lord allowed me to read about a dear friend, the person that's become a dear friend of mine, George Mueller.

And you know what George Mueller said? He said that he never wanted anyone to see him tired. He never wanted anyone to see him worried. He never wanted anyone to see him just totally strung out because of his great service to God, because he was afraid that if someone saw that they would think that his master was cruel.

He wanted people to look at him and see all his flaws, not hide anything, see everything about him, look at him and then say, what a master this man must have. I've searched up and down around his life. I find nothing special.

And yet his head seems to be constantly wet with the blessings of God. The joys manifested in his life, God's protection in his life, so many things. And we can't find one reason in him for all these things.

He must have such a wonderful master. Oh, let us go and seek the Lord that we might have a master as he has. Do you remember some of the all those tapes from Hannibal that go around? And when I preached there, God did some things and a lot of guys thought that I was the Apostle Paul.

They just boy, they wanted to come to Peru. God called them to come to Peru for two months to be with the Apostle Paul. When they got off that plane, they thought I walked on water.

When they got back on that plane, they were praying for my salvation. Now to carnal people again, they will take that and say, well, look, brother, Paul's not perfect. We just go live in.

No, you know what I'm talking about here tonight, don't you? That God's blessing is not resting upon any man because he is some kind of special person. God's blessing rests upon men because of his son, Jesus Christ. You remember, you always hear this statement.

I know you hear it. You know, Jesus is is all you need. Let me tell you something.

Jesus is all you have. He's not just all you need. He's all you have.

And that is enough. That is enough. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, for he knows our frame.

He is mindful that we are dust. God takes his eyes off his own glory to look at dust. God takes his hands from stars and galaxies and holds dust to his bosom.

We hear nowhere of God hugging angels. We hear no, no, no place in scripture of God embracing stars. But you, now you, you're quite something else, aren't you? He calls dust to life and things that are not, he calls them to be and then embraces them.

You say, boy, one day I just hope that, you know, I grow in the Lord and and that'll be true with me. You just misunderstood everything I said, didn't you? From the moment, oh, the moment my boy was born, doctor said, I need to check him. You've checked him long enough.

He's mine. We got to take him. So you're not taking him anywhere.

I've looked around this room. I don't see a person I can't beat up. You're not taking my son.

Well, they finally let me walk down to the place where then you hand the baby over. And no, I'm not letting go. They let me stay in the place where you hand the baby.

I'm not letting go of this baby. You see, the love for my child, the moment he was, could give nothing, could offer nothing except poop on me. That's all he could do and spit up and everything else.

The moment I saw him, I could not let him go. Let's let's do an exercise now. I'm not Shirley MacLaine, but let's do an exercise here.

I want everyone to breathe in. Now breathe out. Where'd that come from? God.

Learn from your own breathing. A breath, every breath, every beat of your heart comes from God. Then what will you offer him that he might love you? What will you give him to wrestle love from his hands? If everything you have, he's given you.

Then why are you striving? And why are you working? And why are you wondering? And why, when you sin, do you allow your sin to make you run farther away? I know it's that serpent. I know what he tells you. And it's not true.

It's not true. Yes, run when you sin. Run.

Run, run, flee to him. Because a broken, contrite heart. And you'll be surprised that when you take off running, that you haven't even started spinning your wheels before he's already there.

Because as it says in Isaiah, this broken heart of yours, he will not despise. He will not despise. He will not.

We have a story in Peru about a woman in Rio de Janeiro. It's one of my most favorite. I just love this story.

It's true. Just gorgeous Brazilian girl. And the woman cleaned houses and she knew she knew her daughter's too beautiful.

She knew that in time that daughter was going to bolt for a better life in Rio de Janeiro. And she knew that she would not find that they're modeling or anything else, but would end up being a prostitute and a drug addict. And she was terrified of that.

And one night after she came home from cleaning houses, she got to her house and the thing that she had feared more than anything on that dirt floor hut that she lived in was a note that said, Mom, I'm going to Rio de Janeiro to find a better life. This is what the mother did. She took all the money that she had.

She separated a bus ticket with that money. Then she took the rest of her money and she went into a little photo shop. And she took picture after picture after picture of herself.

The mother did until she spent all her money on pictures. And then she turned them over and wrote something on the back of all of them. And then she went to Rio.

She went to every house of prostitution, every tavern, every Waco. It's a place in South America where you take drugs. She went to every place she could possibly find where she knew her daughter after being sold into prostitution and everything else.

She went to every place where she knew that she would go. And when she gave away all the pictures she had and searched as long as she could, she went back to her house and she waited. Months later, that beautiful girl had aged about 15 years.

She was already in prostitution. She had already lost every virtue that she ever knew could exist in the life of a woman. She was distraught.

She wanted to die. She didn't want to go home because of the shame. And she's walking down the steps of a brothel.

And she walks by a mirror and she looks in the mirror and she's checking herself and she sees, she doesn't even recognize herself anymore. And then all of a sudden in a corner right there in the corner of the mirror, there's a picture of her mother. She can't believe it's a picture of her mother.

And she grabbed it and she looked at it and she thought, oh, I'd give anything, anything if I could just go home. But I can't go home. I can't go home.

And she turned it over and in Portuguese, this is what the mother wrote. I do not care what you have become. I do not care what you have done.

Come home. Please come home. Now, Jesus once set aside a very important principle.

He said, if you being evil can give such good gifts to your children, how much more your heavenly father. Now, if human love can extend that far and we are evil. That's what the Bible says.

We are evil and we can love that greatly. How much does the father call you when you sin? True Christian, I'm not talking about you. You bold faced people who live in sin and cherish it and mock the name of Christ by claiming, you know, when I'm talking tonight to those of you who truly know Christ.

When you sin, notice, I didn't say if I said when you sin, why do you always run the other direction? As though Christ power was not true, as though the cross was not enough, as though the father's love was unconditional. Don't do that anymore. It's wrong.

And I'm not saying it just because it hurts you. I'm saying it because it breaks the heart of God. God wants to show forth his love in a strong way.

He saved you to magnify his greatness by giving love to those who do not deserve it. That's what this is all about. And so run to him.

When you feel righteous, run to him knowing you are not. When you feel that you are unrighteous, run to him knowing that he loves you. It doesn't matter what you've done.

It does not matter. Some people in our church a while back committed some, a lady committed some heinous crimes against other people. And I'm known as the great preacher of righteousness.

One morning, she came forward, fell on the altar like someone poured her out. And some of the most righteous people in our church, some of the most devoted people in our church, people who preach righteousness, people who others say of them, well, you know, they're holier than thou and they don't love because they're always preaching about the commands of God. It was those very people who ran to that girl.

Scooped her up. And when she cried out, oh, God, forgive me, they declared, oh, he has. And then they stood up beside her.

And this is what they did. I'll never forget the boldness on these brother's sister's faces. They stood up beside her and said now.

For everyone in this church this Sunday morning, God has forgiven this woman. And she is forgiven. If another word is spoken against her, if an accusation is made against her, you will be brought under possible church discipline, because if the Lord has forgiven her, she is forgiven.

And if you cannot come up here and love her and embrace her and hold her and pray for her, then you should no longer be a member of this church. You see how it works. You see how it works.

There is a standard of righteousness. There is a prophetic call. There is a crying out for holiness.

There is a word that says repent. But all my friend, if you've been cut to the core, if your heart's been broken in pieces, no, if you come, you will be completely forgiven and perfectly loved. You see, that's what we don't understand.

Look at the woman who came to Jesus. He goes into the house of the religious and they with their great culture and religious etiquette receive him, of course. And then here comes a woman, an evil woman, a bad woman.

She falls down. She weeps. She touches him.

Oh, my. Look at this. And he says he's a prophet.

She touched him. I wouldn't. I'd let a dog lick me on the face before I would let that woman touch me.

Well, there goes our Messiah. It's time to look for another. And he hears them.

A word with you, Simon. That's one of the most beautiful pictures in the whole Bible. Do you want to know why? It's one of the reasons a reporter came to me one time.

He was so mad. He goes, why are you always preaching about sin? Why are you always preaching about sin? And I said, it's because, young man, I want you to love God. He said, what do you mean you want me to love God? I said, have you never heard? Have you never read? She loves much because she's been forgiven much.

You see, today in the church, we don't preach much on sin anymore. And therefore, we don't know how much we've been forgiven. And therefore, we don't know how much we've been loved.

And the grace of God is not magnified. Oh, take me, tie me to horses and drag me through a manure pile. If the grace of God will be magnified, I'm not ashamed to tell you what I was before He met me.

If His grace might be magnified in the darkness of my spiritual death. Do you know, after all that was finished, Jesus went back to the lady. He said, your sins are forgiven.

Just like that. Your sins are forgiven. No lecture.

Isn't that amazing? No lecture. No, you know, no. Let's go through 20 years of your life now and pick you apart and show all the ways you've messed up your life.

And then maybe if I think about it, I'll give you some help. Now, one second, one second is gone. I mean, that's not right.

It's just not right. We think it just can't be that way. It's like when he hires those guys to go into the field and they work.

Some of them get hired in the morning. They get hired in the morning. They're working all day.

Some midday they get hired. Others hired. Finally, some guys go in at the end of the day and they're hired.

I mean, I know about working on a farm. They got their tools, walked halfway out to the field. And the other guys were walking back and they just turned around and walked with them.

They didn't do anything. And then when the master comes to pay them, he pays them first. And then the other guys get really mad about it and they go, that's not fair.

And Jesus goes, fine, you want me to be fair? You all go to hell. The only thing that makes that right is that he spilled his blood for you. And that's a wonderful thing.

The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Isn't that amazing? Do you know what that means? I know what you think it means because I watch you when you stand in line to get the treats downstairs. You think, well, I'll just take the last place and that's not what it means.

Let me share with you something. When first is last and last is first, there is no first or last. You finally come to a place where there's no longer any of this evangelical competition.

Who's closest to the throne? I hate that. Because you want to know why? Because if my closeness to the throne depends on my ability to preach or my spirituality or any other thing, I'm still going to be left out. And if I'm going to be left out, then you might as well just send me to hell.

Because all my life, just like you, I've not been first place. And I'll never be first place. And if I've got to go where I've got to spend eternity for the rest of my life, being secondary and tertiary and everything else.

Well, then where am I supposed to go? I want to go to a place where I'm not first and I'm not last. I'm just happy. I'm just loved.

He said, your sins are forgiven. Go. Well, let me explain.

You don't have to explain. I know. I know.

You know, the most powerful praying, the most powerful prayer that the Lord has taught me. When I am in the throes of the deepest darkness. When I am scared to death, when I have no place to go and when my own righteousness and holiness and all that other stuff has failed and my devotion is lacking.

You know, the most powerful words that ever come out of my mouth. I'll share them with you and with you. To sit there in the darkness at four in the morning, trembling like a leaf and look up through that window in my office and say, you know, you know, and to be flooded with peace, you know, enough said, you know.

He knows. He knows. And he loves you.

He loves. Oh, I can't figure out why he loves me. Well, let me fill you in.

He loves you because he's loved and because he's made a way for his love through his son, Jesus Christ. Now stop asking that question. It's like a guy walks up to you and hands you a million dollars.

You're going to stand there going to look for. No, boy, I take this. I need to know why you're giving it to me.

No, you're just. Thank you very much. It has been so perverted that salvation is a gift.

Treated in a cheap way, but my friend, that doesn't take away the truth that salvation is a gift, it is a gift, but I'm not coming to him, you know, with a with a pure heart, you know, altruistically, every one of us came to him because we had a need. What do you think? Your sins are forgiven. Now, what does that mean? Your sins are forgiven.

Sounds so ecclesiastical because we don't understand it. We have to be careful about theological models. We have to be careful about saying a certain statement over and over because it loses its power.

The first time I crossed the Andes Mountains as a young missionary, I was sitting beside Homer Crane, big old rough missionary. We called him the John Wayne of South America. And he's snoring so loud it made the train.

You couldn't hear the train. He was snoring so loud. And I'm thinking, how could this guy go across the beautiful Andes Mountains snoring like this? I mean, it's it's unbelievable.

And then several years later, I took a group of guys across the Andes Mountains and I was sitting there snoring because when you see something too often, it becomes common. You know, don't be afraid, you know, it's like Brother Charles used to tell me, he goes, people say, well, why are we going to study on faith? I mean, I understand that already. Let's go to something else.

You could study faith for a million years. You could study Ephesians one throughout all eternity and never get it. And this word, you are forgiven, will be one of the themes throughout all of heaven.

I want to submit to you what I believe a part of what this means, not just that your sins are taken away as far as the east is from the west. But song of Solomon chapter four, verse seven, when Jesus told that woman, when he said, your sins are forgiven, there was a deeper romance there. There was a deeper, more powerful ocean title like moving love going on there.

There was sentiment there. It was just not an ecclesiastical pronouncement over her, but it was a passionate declaration of love. Look what he says when he said.

Your sins are forgiven for seven. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. Isn't that something? Isn't that powerful? Now we're talking about the power of the cross.

Now we're getting at the good stuff. You think it just meant, OK, you're forgiven. I'm not going to kill you now.

Do you think that's all it means? I'm not going to kill you now. You can come in, but you mess up one time, you're gone. See, that's what so many people have this like.

And this is what he says. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. Isn't that wonderful? Now, this was written, you know, people say, well, I have a lot of trouble with this because it's about, you know, this is a woman and everything like that.

But, you know, women can understand this. Let me just talk to the women for a second. I don't know how you live in this hellish, damnable world.

I know what you think. Because there's a woman close to my heart and I know what she suffers. What do you have to be now to be beautiful? Five foot ten, weigh three and a half pounds.

Isn't that true? Be a physics major and own a corporation and be super spiritual and all these different things. And that's one of the reasons why I hate it when you watch television and things like that, because you're being pumped full of lies of what beauty is. And it hurts you, my little daughter.

It hurts you. It hurts you so much. Those lying, stinking buyers and sellers, they hate you.

That's why it's not because I'm just some kind of Puritan that didn't know when he should have died. The reason why I tell you these things, my dear friend, is because they hurt you. They hurt you.

You know what you feel, girl, don't you? You know, you know what it's like to be cold, don't you? You know who the prettiest ones are. You know who the ones who get called, you know, all those things, don't you? Let's not lie. You know it.

And it hurts. Well, guess what? There's a lover out there. And this is what he says about you.

You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. Isn't that wonderful? You are altogether beautiful, my darling. And there is no blemish in you.

And for you guys, have your Father. Look at you, son. You're the most beautiful thing to me.

And there is no fault in you. There is no fault in you. Lord, how could these things be? Because I am able, son.

I am able to make you stand before me with great joy. How can these things be? But now look at what love does. Love clamors.

Love calls. Love beckons to you. You see, some of you might have the idea that when I talk about holiness and things like that, that I'm talking about dotting every I and crossing every T. And well, there are commands and you need to obey them.

But holiness goes so much farther than that. Holiness, the word means separation. Not just separation from, but separation unto.

You see, God is holy, not because, not primarily because he's sinless. God is holy because he's not like anybody else. He's totally and completely separate.

When your problem is when you come to God, some of the characteristics that you've seen in other people that have dealt with you, you think those same characteristics are the same. Those same characteristics are in God. They're not.

You see, let me give an example, something that was taught me. And it's been very, very helpful. Take God.

Most of you think like here's God and here's a, you know, like a seraphim stands in his presence. And then here is a microbe in your toilet. And that seraph is, of course, more like God than the microbe in your toilet.

I got news for you. He's not. That seraph that stands before the presence of God is no more like God than that microbe in your toilet, because there's no one like God.

There's no one even close to see when you get into a love relationship with God, you've got to redefine everything. He's not going to love you like your dad loved you. He's not going to love you like your mother loves you.

He's not going to love you like your husband loves you. As the heavens are higher than the earth. So his everlasting loving kindness is higher than anything he has not seen.

And I hope it never does. That's a scary thought, isn't it? You know why that happened? So that you would stop saying, boy, that guy's eloquent, eloquent. That's proof right there that a lot of things I say aren't inspired.

He doesn't love you like anyone else. He really doesn't. Can you get that through your thick head? He doesn't love you like everyone else.

You know, don't think you're a victim now. I'm not saying that you hurt people as much as they hurt you. He's not like you either.

There used to be an old hippie song back in the 70s before a lot of you were born. Went something like, and if I was God, Abraham would have been dead. And if I was God, Moses would have been dead.

If I was God, y'all been dead. If I was God, I'd be dead. Talking about God loving conditionally that he does not do that.

Well, see, when you talk about love, when you talk about God, you can't point to anything else. You've got to start out on completely new ground. Let me give you a perfect example.

Moses comes to God, says, OK, who are you? You're sending me down there. I don't have a name. And he goes, I am who I am.

Now, if a Martian came down into Hannibal tonight, and I suspect there's probably some already here. If a Martian came down to Hannibal tonight and looked at me and said, who are you? I would say, well, I am. Well, I'm like him and I'm like him and I'm like her.

And well, there's a whole bunch of examples of what I'm like. I'll just point outside myself to a multitude of examples and you can kind of see who I am. But when Moses came to God and said, who are you? He said, I am who I am.

There's no one outside of God that he can point to as an example of who he is, not the mightiest, most glorious angel in heaven. But 2000 years ago, someone said, God, who are you? And for the first time in history, he pointed down to earth to a man and he said, I am like him. He pointed to his son, Jesus Christ.

Have you ever seen such a friend of sinners? Have you ever seen such a friend? Have you ever seen such an enemy of the arrogant? But have you ever seen such a friend of humble, broken sinners? You'll never find a love like Jesus. Now, that love that it calls to you, it really does. And this is what it says.

Look in verse eight. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride. May you come with me from Lebanon.

Journey down from the summit of Amana and from the summit of Sanir and Hermon, from the den of lions and from the mountains of leopards. Oh, those you new babes in Christ, you young Christians, you college students, you old people. Listen to me.

Look what he's saying. Come down. I know I'm going to sound seriously over spiritualizing text and stuff, but just bear with me at this.

Come down. Don't be haughty. Come down.

Come down. Don't be bold faced. Don't be brazen.

Don't be proud. Don't be arrogant. Come down.

Just come down. The safest man on the face of the earth, you take a tiny little servant of the Lord, broken and contrite before him and crying out for grace. And I'll put that one little man against all the armies of the world.

No one can hurt him in that place. There is a place where you can go where they can't get you. Come down.

Stop walking in your pride. How do you know you're walking in your pride? You're walking in your pride when you don't listen to him, when he tells you. Why do you think he gave you commands? Yes, for his righteousness, for his glory and all those things, just like I have spoken of.

But never let it slip your mind. He gave you those commands because he loves you. Have you ever obeyed his command and it has done you eternal damage? Never.

Have you ever disobeyed his commands and cut your own heart out with your disobedience? Yes. How many times? You young people, he tells you the way you're to enter in and not to enter into relationships. He tells you all these different commands of what to look at, what not to look at, how to dress, what not to wear, all these different things, how to act, how to walk.

And he's saying, don't be proud. Do this. Be a humble, hidden sort of people broken before me and the beauty of Christ will rest upon you.

Don't take off these glorious garments in order to put on this pitiful, elaborate and ostentatious garb of the world. Don't do that. He says, come down from the den of lions and from the mountains of leopards.

You see, my friend up there on that proud hill, up there on that proud arrogance and that rejoicing in Christian liberty and all these different things that they call it nowadays. There's lions up there. There's wolves up there and they will get you.

They will get you. They will claw you. They will hurt you.

They will mar you. They're no good for you. Stay away from there.

Stay away from there. Do you think God gave commands just because he's the universal kill joy? He said, I came to give you life and life and abundance. His great prayer to the father was that the disciples joy would be full.

It's just he knows how to give you joy and you don't know how to get it. Listen to him. He says, come down now, look at verse nine.

Oh, I love this. You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride. You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes.

What does that mean? Well, I know what it means because I'm in love. I remember the first time my wife cut her eyes at me. I thought my head was going to blow off.

I thought my heart was going to rip out of my chest. Do you realize what it's saying here? Do you have a clue? You go to pray. All right.

You go to pray. Oh, God, where are you? You haven't shown up. There's a bronze ceiling over my head and all these things.

OK, who are you going to believe? Let me ask you something. Who are you going to believe? I'm tired of this. Who are you going to start believing? Your heart's telling you there's a bronze ceiling over your head and God's nowhere around and he's not listening to you and you're just wasting your time.

And after all, your knees hurt and your back hurts. And why are you down here anyway? And most of you, is it not true? You spend most of your time crying out to God because he's not there, don't you? Instead of just praying, look what this says, that God's heart beats faster with a single glance of your eyes. Wow.

Now that is good. I look up at my little boy looks at me, man, man, I'm a goner. I mean, I am a goner.

I look up at him. You know what I can't wait for? Whenever these meetings end, if they end tonight, so be it. If they could, I don't know.

But I hit that door and that little boy is running straight for that door. Man, you talk about heartbreaking is the day when mom cries out, Ian, dad's home. OK, that'll kill me.

You see, what you need to realize is you think, oh, God, if you would just look my way, my heart would beat so much. And God says, every time you look my way, my heart beats faster. Do you see how much he loves you? We're not talking about ecclesiastical.

God's got to do this because Jesus died type of stuff. We're talking about passion. We're talking about the cross of Christ has made a way for him to love you.

Freely and fully to passionately pour out over you his love. It's amazing. So the next time you're sitting there and that that old ceiling is over you, that bronze ceiling and you can't pray and all these different things hold one thing in your heart.

It says that with a mere glance of your eyes, his heart beats faster. That'll make you want to pray, that'll make you want to pray. It's amazing.

And he says, you've made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, with a single strand of your necklace. Now, this is Shepard girl. Shepard girls don't have necklaces.

So where did she get the necklace? She got it from the bridegroom. Has he given you anything? What about robes of righteousness? Look at this with a single strand. You see, here's the thing.

When God looks at you, sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Do you see that? He sees the righteousness of Christ. Here's something very important you need to understand.

Righteousness means more than forgiveness. Do you understand that? It means more than forgiveness. He's not only forgiven you.

Do you remember every how would you like every time you turn the corner, the heavens opened up and a voice came down from heaven that said, this is my beloved son or this is my beloved daughter in whom I'm well pleased. So that kind of make your day. Well, we see that in the gospels.

You know, Jesus does. This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. This is my beloved son.

Listen to him. This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. Because Jesus was the only man.

Because he was the God man who lived a perfect life before his father, always doing what is pleasing to the father. He was perfectly righteous. And so the father declared, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

The moment you trusted in Jesus Christ, that perfect life that he lived was given to you. And then you're walking across campus one day. Don't be surprised if the heavens just opened up.

God said, this is my beloved daughter, son, I'm well pleased. I'm well pleased. And why is he well pleased? Because of what he did for you, not what you did for him.

Because that beautiful strand of beads, that necklace around your neck, he gave it to you. You don't have to put it on and say, oh, I hope this will do when I come into his presence, because he's the one who gave it to you and told you to wear it. That is wonderful.

Man, that's good. I'm so happy. Ten.

How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride? How much better is your love than wine and the fragrance of your oils than all kinds of spices? Your love toward God is more beautiful to him than the most beautiful things he has made, the most exquisite things he has made on this earth. When we talk about exquisite things in the scripture, it talks about linen and spices and so many things like that, oils and ointments. And you know what he's saying? Look, it's so wonderful.

He said that your love is better than the fragrance of oils, all kinds of spices. You want something to offer God. All these men out there today offering their big ministries to God.

You want to offer something to God? Love him. Love him. Student came to me one time.

Brother Paul, what is the greatest sin a person can commit? I said, well, what's the greatest command? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Well, I think not doing that would be about the worst thing you could do. There's one thing that although it can be taken too far, but don't you see God is most glorified when we are.

God is glorified when we're just satisfied in us being loved by him and him loving us. What is it that you want to offer this king? You're a shepherd boy. You're a shepherd girl.

You don't even belong in the palace. What is it you plan on bringing him? Because love is better than everything. Also, you need to understand that in the religious order of the Old Testament, all these spices and fragrance and oils and things used in religious ritual.

He doesn't want your religious ritual. He doesn't want you burning incense on an altar. He doesn't want that.

He wants something more. He wants your heart. He wants your heart.

What keeps you from loving him? Can I ask you that question? I know two things that probably keep you from loving him. One is how many of you do not know who you're going to marry? Raise your hand. You do not know who you're going to marry.

Those of you guys that are married, put your hands down. All right. Those of you raised your hand.

If you're madly in love with your wife or husband right now, you need counseling because you can't be madly in love with them right now, can you? Because you don't know them. You can't be madly in love with someone you don't know. And people are always asking me, how can I generate love for God in my heart? How can I make my heart come to life? Well, don't go to an Acquire the Fire concert or something, because that's going to get you psyched up for about two weeks, and then you'll be right back where you started from.

You need something deeper. You know, when I first got married to my wife, I said, man, I love her. And my uncle goes, no, you don't.

What do you mean, no, I don't. He goes, wait 10 years, then talk to me about love. And you'll see that you'll love her 10 years after, much more than when you first met her.

And why is that? Because we've suffered through so many things together, and because I know her more. And she and I are evil. And that works out that way.

Now, how can you get love for God? What fountain are you going to go to? The more you know him, his beauty, his excellency. That's why it's so important to teach on the attributes of God with passion. The more you see his beauty, his excellencies, and his perfections, and his kindnesses towards you, the more you will love him.

And then another thing that keeps you from loving him, fear. You really can't believe that he could really love you that much. You are distanced from God because you really can't believe that his love is really that unconditional.

But realize this, whenever there's a wall, you're the one that's building it, not him. You're the wall builder. He's the wall taker away.

Believe that he is who he says he is. Seek his face. One of the saddest things about theology is sometimes when someone writes a really good theology book or someone writes something like the Westminster Confession or something, we go, well, let's close the chapter on that.

Now we know everything that's to be known. So let's not go any farther. And students, listen to me.

How come in our theology books there isn't page after page after page after page written on the beauty of God? It was beauty that attracted you to your wife. Something of beauty that attracted you to your husband. Maybe just the sun in your eyes.

I don't know. Why don't we talk about that? The beauty of God, the beauty of his holiness, beauty of God. Now he goes on and he says in verse 11, your lips, my bride, drip honey.

Honey and milk are under the tongue. And the fragrance of the garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon, Lebanon, your lips. He wants to hear your prayers.

He wants to hear your prayers. He loves to hear you talk to him. He just don't want you to talk goofy like you've been doing it.

You know, I watch people when they pray so much and you know what people do. I've noticed that so many times they spend so much of their praying, lamenting the fact that God's not there. Oh, God, please come, come, come, come, come.

God, please come, come. Help me, God. Help me, God.

Why don't you just believe? Oh, God. Though I am engulfed in darkness. Though every bit of sensory perception is taken from me.

Though I feel nothing like a stone. I know my redeemer lives. I know my redeemer loves me.

And I know my redeemer is here. So it will not be my mind or my flesh. That I will trust.

But your word that says all these wonderful things about the relationship I have with you. And I will pray. He loves to hear you praying.

But praying is not just intercession. Praying is not just asking God even for things for people who are in China. We've got a real problem there.

Prayer is just this relationship of speaking. This relationship of loving this full gamut of life. You know, you're walking with God if you can sit there and pick up an old leaf in the fall and literally fall on your knees and marvel at how God made this thing.

And then talk to him about ice cream and all the kind of things that you really like. You are all far too religious and not near enough of you have been to Narnia. How many of you have ever read Chronicles of Narnia? Well, go read them again.

You've grown too old. It is walking with God, talking with God. I was in this very legalistic place one time, and I felt like the Lord led me to preach a sermon I knew was going to get me in all kinds of trouble.

And it did. The title of the sermon was Dancing with God. Because why? Enough of this religious stuff.

Enough of these chords. Some people say the root of the word religion means to bind, to put yourself in a binding in order to please a deity. I've had enough of that.

But it's freedom. To dance with God. Not freedom for your flesh, but freedom to walk with him and to be loved and to know you're loved and to rejoice and to do all things for the glory of God.

Someone was talking to me today after I was speaking at the university down there in St. Louis. They said, you know, well, the secular sacred. I said, who gave you that language? They said, well, you know, things are secular and I said, who told you that? I said, you are now in the kingdom of Christ.

There is nothing secular. All things are sacred. And everything you do, you do for the glory of God.

Do it for the glory of God. I look at my little boy because we both love this custard ice cream. It's a place called Yesterday's.

It's really good. And and I can look at him and say, hey, son, let's go glorify God. Let's go glorify God.

Now, some of you parents are in trouble because when you drive home tonight, your children are going to want to be glorifying God like never before. Hey, dad, let's go glory. Hey, dad, let's go glorify God.

You see, there's nothing secular and sacred. It's all sacred. All of it.

Young boy said I was struggling. I'm on the baseball team. He was telling me, you know, it's I'm having to divide my time between baseball and God.

And I said, well, God doesn't play baseball. And if he doesn't play baseball, you better not be out there. He said, what do you mean? I said, if you're not out there swinging that bat with the pleasure of God resting upon you and the joy of the Lord to get off that field as though you were in a brothel.

Because whether you eat or drink or any other thing, you're to do it to the glory of God. Now, it says in 12, a garden locked, a garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a spring sealed up. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranate and choice fruits, henna with Nard plants.

Now, I know this sounds strange, but let's look over this one more time. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a locked, a garden locked, a spring sealed up. What does that mean? This woman doesn't belong to

anybody but him.

To everybody else, she's off limits. Church, a garden locked. And she's a spring sealed up.

When her doors are open, her windows are open, same way with you guys, you know, wearing your muscle shirts and all the other things. I'm not much, but what I am belongs to a woman and it doesn't belong to anybody else, not to touch and not even to look at. The beauty of Christ is being sealed up.

It's being hidden. It's being here. How many gorgeous women have I known that were nothing more than like a gold ring and a pig snout? Oh, no, no, no.

These are not for you. This is not for you. You're not children of the world.

You're children of God. You are children of God. And as the church, you see, don't give yourself to that.

Now I am talking spiritually. Don't give yourself to the world because the world's not your husband. Don't do that.

Why? The world can't give you the pleasures. He can't lay before you a table as your Lord can. As your mighty master can.

Don't do that. You're just going to to demire things and you're going to hurt yourself. Now, I'm going along if you have to leave.

I understand. But I got this time and this is maybe all the time I have left and I'm going to just keep going. Verse 16.

Awake, oh, north wind and come wind of the south. Make my garden breathe out fragrance. Let its spices be waft abroad.

May my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruit. Now, this little shepherd girl, this is amazing. What does she desire with her little garden that she's got, that she's made? What does she desire? What's her greatest passion? I'll tell you what it is.

The only thing she wants is for the wind to come and blow the fragrance of that garden to her beloved, that her beloved might come and accept the garden. That he might be drawn to her and accept the garden. Young Christian, old Christian, do you remember when you were like this? Do you remember when you were first saved? And I mean, just the thought of being able to, you know, maybe do something, you know, it didn't matter what it was in the church or are just something, you know, to do something for Jesus, to just, you know, serve him or our witness or read your Bible or something that maybe, you know, he would see it and go, wow.

Or he would come and this is great. Or there would be fellowship or presence and you just kind of looked around all the time, you know, you just wanted to do things that would draw Jesus to you. Do you remember that? What happened? What happened? When you were first saved, there were times you thought that you just, you could not not see him.

And you could not stop longing for him. What happened? What happened? Theology is extremely important to me, guys. I study it quite a bit, even though I haven't advanced much.

I study books are important, but all of it's done without him. Everything you do, you should do that he might come. Everything you do, you do that you might have a greater relationship with him.

If you just want to be the best preacher, then just leave. Do you want to be used of God? You ever wondered why you pray so much to be used of God? When you maybe should pray more that your friend besides you would be used of God and you could carry the luggage? Oh, dear friend, look at verse one, chapter five. I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride.

I've gathered my mirth along with my balm. I've eaten my honeycomb and my honey. I have drunk my wine and my milk.

Eat friends, drink and imbibe deeply, oh lovers. Now look at this. She's got the garden.

She's the one that made the garden. Do you understand that? A little shepherd girl made a garden. He's the king.

He has 30,000 people making him gardens, but she's bold, isn't she? I mean, this guy has hanging gardens. There's never been gardens like this guy has. He's got gardens on top of gardens.

He's got acres, hundreds, thousands of acres of gardens. But she's bold enough to think that he's going to want her little patch of tomatoes or whatever. Where does she get such boldness? Who does she think she is? It's not who does she think she is.

It's who she thinks he is. She knows he really loves her. And that's what I want you to know.

So you'll be bold in his love. So you'll be bold in his love. Be bold in his love.

Not because there are men who are bold, supposedly, in the love of God because they claim the right to his love by their own virtue. That is stupidity and religious pride. But you're bold in his love.

Why? Because you know who he is. Because you know that love springs forth from his heart. You know, he's a great God and a great savior and a great lover.

So you can be bold. And look what he does. He takes the garden for his own.

I have come into my garden, my garden, my sister, my bride. I have gathered my mirth along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey.

I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends, drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers. There's a few truths here that are very important.

He takes it as his own. He doesn't despise it. My dear Christian, listen to me.

A cane that has been broken. Remember the little parable? He won't throw away. A smoldering flax or a wick on a lamp.

He won't snuff out. He won't do that. Because if he did, I wouldn't be here right now.

What does that mean? You go to no matter how small, broken you are and the things you offer to him. He'll not crush you. He'll not say, no, I will not accept such things.

And so you can go to Israel and when the kids were little, they would go and they would play there. They'd make flutes out of cane. But there's a problem with cane.

It is really, really easy to break. When you're trying to make the flute holes, it breaks. Now, you can't fix that.

I mean, it would take you two days to try to put that thing back together. And why should you? There's millions of other canes. I mean, you find cane everywhere.

Throw that thing away. Get you another piece that's stronger and make you a flute. He won't do that with you.

He works on you to play beautiful music out of you. And you're weak and you're fragile and you're wrong sometimes and you break. He doesn't just throw you away and say, OK, fine.

This thing doesn't want to cooperate. I got another bunch of group of people. I'll just get somebody else.

He doesn't do that. And then a lamp. You ever walked into a room where the wick is burning? It stinks so bad you can't stand it.

So here's a lamp that is lit in order to give light, but it has no oil in it. And therefore, it starts burning the wick. It stinks up everything.

It smells like garbage. You open the window of the house, you throw the lamp out, you open up all the windows and try to get the stink out. He doesn't do that.

He saved you and filled you with oil. OK, you quench the spirit. You've been doing things you shouldn't have done.

He's not going to take you and throw you out. He's going to prune that wick and it's going to cut. It's going to hurt.

I don't want to deceive you. He's going to cut that that burnt ugly part off. He's going to fill you with oil again.

He's going to light you and you're going to be a light. He's not going to throw you away. He doesn't throw her little garden away.

Do you remember when you were a brand new Christian? Everything was so fresh. You know, I mean, you witness to somebody and it was like you were preaching to five hundred thousand people in an auditorium. It's big stuff.

The world stopped. Well, it did for God. It's big stuff.

Everything is big stuff. Everything is big stuff for God. Why? Because of his love, because of his love.

Now, first two, I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice, my beloved, was knocking open to me. My sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one for my head is drenched with do my locks with the lamp of the night.

Now he comes to her. He comes to her in the middle of the night unannounced. And you know why he comes unannounced? Because when you believe you're loved, when you truly believe you're loved, you don't feel like you have to ask for an invitation.

But then we find something tragic. Her response is I have taken off my dress. How can I put it on again? I've washed my washed my feet.

How can I dirty them again? Look at this. There was a time when this girl went shopping in the market one thousand times a day, just hoping she would bump into this guy. There was a time when she would have done absolutely anything to just felt his presence.

There was a time when she would have climbed the highest mountain to get one glimpse of him. What happened? Now he comes in the middle of the night and she says, look, I'm in bed. I've washed my feet.

I know you're I'm just tired. What happened to her? What happened to you? There used to be a time when you would you would be vigilant, even in the night, you would get up sometimes and pray for his presence, ask for a visitation, turn the TV off and grab your Bible and and try to discover things in his word. And now what happened? What happened? Oh, Lord, you know, I'm tired, done so much.

If you've done so much ministry, you're tired and you're doing too much ministry. Stop it. I'm beginning to think I don't want a ministry.

I just want a life. What happened to you? Same thing that happens to me. Look what it says.

Verse four. My beloved extended his hand through the opening and my feelings were aroused for him. I rose to open to my beloved and my hands dripped with mirth and my fingers with liquid mirth on the handles of the boat.

I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and had gone. Now, listen to me, men left something like a calling card when they would come to visit their beloved and if they weren't home, they would put a little bag of mirth or something of ointment on the on the lock of the door on the handle so that you'd smell the fragrance and knew that they had been there and you missed them. She ran to the door and to her surprise, the only thing that was left was a fragrance of someone who is now gone.

I just described the way many of you feel in your devotional life. You spend a great part of your devotional life trying to call back one whom you feel has gone. And let me tell you something.

Strong love is easily offended. It is easily hurt. My dear friend, when you hear the master call, go, I call it the doctrine of initiative.

It's probably a dumb name to call it something like that, but I've discovered this. If I walk into the hotel room tonight and something just tugs at my heart, it says, seek me. I know that's not the devil.

I know that's not me. I know that's God taking initiative with me. And I also know that when I have heard that voice and I have fallen down and sought him, there has been pleasure.

And when I have said, oh, Lord, I have ministered today. I am tired. I'm going to go to bed.

What glories have I missed? You know, Jesus always seems in the Bible and also in my own personal prayer life. He always seems to walk by my door rather than walking to my door. Now, I see that in my own

personal prayer life, but I also see it in the lives of the apostles.

They're in the boat. He walks as though he's walking by the boat and they call out to him. How many times in prayer I've said, oh, Lord, you have come.

Do not pass me by. Turn in with me on the road to Emmaus. He was just keep going there, wasn't he? No, turn in with us.

Did not our hearts burn with him? Turn in with us. Come to me, oh, gentle savior. The Lord loves to be asked to be asked.

And how many times do we switch, switch loves to switch loves? Oh, my Lord, let's not do that. Let's not do that. And then he says, I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and had gone.

My heart went out to him as he spoke and I searched for him, but did not find him. I called him, but he did not answer me. The watchman who made the rounds in the city found me.

They struck me and wounded me. The guardsmen of the wall took away my shawl for me. You know, when we separate ourself from the Christ, when we separate ourselves from the beloved, there's no protection and there's no longer any glory.

You see, he's our glory. He's our mark of royalty. He truly is my friend.

He's our mark that separates us. We are separated by him. His glory rests upon us when we walk away from him.

Then we're in the street like a commoner. Now we're in the street like a commoner. Now you want to walk beside him.

All these crazy TV evangelists screaming at the devil. They ought to be terrified because the Lord tells us don't talk about the devil that way. He's not afraid of the sheep.

He's afraid of the shepherd standing over the sheep. When you're away from him, you have no glory and you have no protection. Now, verse eight, I adjure your daughters of Jerusalem.

If you find my beloved, as to what will you tell him? For I am lovesick. Verse nine, what kind of beloved is your beloved? Oh, most beautiful among women. What kind of beloved is your beloved that you should adjure us? Now, this is something.

She cries out to a bunch of other ladies. Will you go seek him for me? Will you go seek him for yourself? Will you seek him? And the answer seems to be, well, why? I mean, he came to your house and you didn't even let him in. I mean, he can't be all that.

I mean, I look at the way that you treat him. I look at what you look when you see him. I look at what you're doing, the complacency, the disinterest and everything else.

No passion. I mean, you're adjuring me to look for Jesus. I mean, you don't even look for him.

Is that sometimes what happens to our testimony? You church, you're out there preaching and you're evangelists and everything else, and it seems to me like you love your cars and your house mortgage more than you love Jesus. You love your clothing and your worldliness and all these different things, and

you're telling us to come to Jesus. I mean, it can't be that big a deal.

I mean, you don't even care that much about him. I mean, I never hear you talk about him. He's not the topic of your conversation on campus.

I mean, you might talk about ministry and you might talk about things that are religious, but I mean, just hearing you talk about the beauties and the glory and the love and the wonder of Christ. I mean, that's so foreign. I mean, you're always telling me what I ought to be doing.

But as far as passion and love, you know, I remember when you fell in love with that guy you thought you fell in love with. That's all you could talk about. That's all you could talk about.

I never hear you talk about Jesus like that. So why should I go look for him? And then comes the repentance. When you lost something, sometimes you realize then what you've lost and she goes wild.

She goes wild. She remembers. Do you know that throughout the Old Testament, isn't it amazing that God is always telling Israel, you know, pile these stones up in a pile and write on them so that you'll remember who I am and what I did.

It's so easy to forget, isn't it? It's so we remember when he first saved you. Remember the joy, remember all the things and even remember, I remember before I was saved at college and I remember getting up in the morning and going to take a shower in the emptiness that was in that shower stall, a dark, fearful, what am I living for type of emptiness that went away when he came? See, it's important to go back and remember. And she does.

She said, my beloved is dazzling and rudy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is like gold, pure gold, and his locks are like clusters of dates and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water bathed in milk and reposed in their setting.

His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet scented herbs. His lips are like lilies dripping with liquid mirth. His hands are like rods of gold set with barrel.

His abdomen is carved ivory and laid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold. His appearance is like leaven and choices.

The cedars, his mouth is full of sweetness and is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughter of Jerusalem. She goes wild.

I mean, she's saying things in here that contradict each other. She's beside herself. She cannot describe.

I mean, her heart begins to burst forth when she thinks about who he really is. Her heart begins to burst forth and she stands up, said, this is the one I'm looking for. First one.

Their response, where has this beloved gone? Almost beautiful among women. Where has your beloved turned that we may seek him with you? Wow. If he's like that, let's go.

Let's go. Now we'll finish and I want you to find out this is the most important part. And for many of you who feel estranged from the Lord, this will be your admonition tonight.

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the bed of balsam, to the pastor, his flocks in the gardens and gather lilies. I am my beloved and my beloved is mine. He who pastures his flock among the lilies.

She's out there. She's neglected his love. She's become disinterested, dispassionate.

She's been marred by other men now. All these things she has done. You would think that her beloved would be standing there at the gate of the garden with a switch or a whip or something with a scowl on his face.

That's the way you expect Jesus to receive you sometimes, don't you? And what's he doing? Well, first of all, where is he? He's right where you left him. And what's he doing? He's out there picking flowers to give to you when you return. Isn't that amazing? That's the only thing that makes me strong enough to live in this world.

That's it. That is it. So where do you go? Well, let's go back.

How fast should you go? As fast as your legs can carry you. Should your head be bowed? No. Your arms should be open.

Your face should be seeking the horizon. And as soon as you see him and get close enough, jump straight into his arms. Let's pray.

Father, now the burden is gone. Bless your people, those who love you. Bless them with the greatest of blessing, your presence.

And give them the sound, strong cure for their souls, which would be a true understanding of your unconditional love. In Jesus name. Amen.

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